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A  
VINDICATION  
OF THE  
MODERN DISSENTERS

AGAINST THE ASPERSIONS OF  
The Rev. WILLIAM HAWKINS, M. A.  
in his BAMPTON-Lecture Sermons,

A N D  
The RIGHT REVEREND AUTHOR of  
*A Review of the Case of the Protestant Dissenters, with  
Reference to the Corporation and Test-Acts.*

INTENDED AS A SUPPLEMENT TO  
DR. JOHNSON'S LIFE OF DR. WATTS  
WITH NOTES.

By SAMUEL PALMER.

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Such Invektives . . . .  
*if not timely corrected, may kindle such heats and animosities among us as  
may TRULY endanger our church and state.*

Bp. of Lincoln's Speech on the Trial of Dr. Sacheverell.

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L O N D O N:  
PRINTED FOR J. JOHNSON, ST. PAUL'S CHURCH-YARD.  
M DCC XC.





## P R E F A C E.

*SOME* readers of the following tract, considering it with reference to the attempts of the Dissenters for the repeal of the Test and Corporation Acts, will probably object to the first two Letters, as being apparently foreign to the subject. It is proper therefore to inform them, that my original design was not to interfere in that controversy, which, from the numerous publications relating to it, did not seem to need any assistance that I could give it. I intended nothing more than to write a brief answer to some injurious reflections of Mr. Hawkins at the end of his Bampton-Lecture Sermons, upon certain NOTES of mine on Dr. JOHNSON's Life of Dr. WATTS; which I meant to publish as a SUPPLEMENT to that work, which first appeared anonymous. But when I came to notice his severe censure of the modern Dissenters, as dangerous enemies both to Church and State, on account of their religious and political sentiments, I was naturally led, in my defence of them, to introduce something in reference to the present subject of warm debate, relative to the Dissenters, in consequence of seeing the liberal abuse thrown out against them by other writers, on the same ground; who urge their supposed dangerous opinions as motives to oppose their access to those offices, from which the Corporation and Test Acts were thought the best means to exclude them.

Among all the publications of this sort which I had met with, The Review of the Case of the Protestant Dissenters (generally supposed to be the production of a Right Reverend Prelate, of very distinguished talents) appeared to be the most plausible, and at the same time the most illiberal. In one place (p. 22) he expresses himself thus: "The merits of  
" the Nonconformists in the reign of Charles II. whatever  
" they

## P R E F A C E.

*“ they might be, can be of no avail to the Protestant Dissenters of the present day, who are no more the children of the old Nonconformists, than the unbelieving Jews of the apostolic age, were the children of faithful Abraham. They are the issue of their loins \*, not the children of their principles. The Dissenters from the Church of England, in the times of the Stuarts, were Calvinists in doctrine, in discipline Presbyterians. What are our modern Nonconformists? In doctrine, Arians, Socinians, Pelagians, Necessarians, Materialists, Antinomians; any thing but Calvinists, &c.”* From these supposed heresies in the religious sentiments of the present Dissenters, and from their equally unsound principles in politics, (which the writer endeavours to prove from detached passages in the writings of Price, Priestley, and Robinson) he infers that they cannot with safety to the church or state, be intrusted with any degree of that power which the repeal of the Test Laws would give them.

*I thought it right therefore to embrace this opportunity of offering a few things, in an additional Letter to this zealous and able author, with a view to remove the unfavourable impressions which such a picture of the Dissenters might make upon the minds of persons unacquainted with them, leaving the rest of his performance to the animadversion of some abler pen. And I consider myself as particularly called, thus far, to remark upon this production, as I am personally and by name held up to view in it, as having contributed my part to*

\* This is far from being universally true. Many of the present Dissenters, who are the warmest in the cause, are converts from the established church. The author of this piece is of *High-Church* extraction; whereas his opponent is “from the loins of the old Nonconformists.” No wonder then that some of us should deviate from some of their principles.

*promote*



## P R E F A C E.

*promote the unsound and disloyal principles which render the Dissenters so obnoxious, by my Protestant Dissenter's Catechism.*

*As to the two first of these Letters, which may seem most foreign to the design of the rest, on an attentive consideration, I presume, they will be found more intimately connected with the main subject than on the first view might appear. The right of private judgment and freedom of enquiry, in opposition to ecclesiastical authority, for which Mr. Hawkins pleads, being the grand fundamental principles of Protestantism, the cause of the Dissenters cannot be more effectually maintained than by the support of them. And if it be true that subscription to the 39 articles does not secure uniformity of faith, but that there is as great a diversity of opinions among the Clergy of the establishment (and consequently among the Laity,) as there is among the Dissenters, it necessarily follows, not only that we are the most consistent in objecting to subscription, but that we are no more dangerous to the church or state than many members of the establishment themselves. And from hence this further inference arises, that in order to the security of both, another Test should be instituted besides the sacramental one, viz. a declaration upon oath of a firm belief of all those doctrines in religion and politics on which the safety both of the ecclesiastical and civil constitution is supposed to depend.*

*I have only to observe further by way of preface, that when we disclaim all hostile designs against the church establishment, we refer only to acts of violence, and say with the apostle, "the weapons of our warfare are not carnal." We wish to propagate no opinions but by fair ARGUMENTS from Scripture and Reason, and these we consider ourselves as at full liberty to use, so long as the freedom of the press is continued: If our opponents have nothing to fear from THESE, they may rest in peace, whether the Test Laws be repealed or*

## P R E F A C E.

*not. If these weapons be at all formidable they are more likely to be employed with zeal after the defeat of our application, than upon the success of it, which would probably render us lukewarm; and therefore as a friend to the cause of Non-conformity alone, I wish the DEFEAT; while as a friend to equity, to the credit of my country, and the interest of pure religion in the church of England, I wish for a REPEAL; but that not till the merits of the cause have been tried by the fullest discussion.*

HACKNEY,  
Feb. 27, 1790.

S. P.

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ERRATUM. Page 5, line 15, *dele* not.

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## A D V E R T I S E M E N T.

The two following tracts, connected with the subject of this, and by the same author, may be had of the publisher.

N. B. The former is translated into WELCH. Price 4d.

THE PRO-

THE  
Protestant - Dissenter's  
C A T E C H I S M.

C O N T A I N I N G,

- I. A BRIEF HISTORY OF THE NONCONFORMISTS:
- II. THE REASONS OF THE DISSENT FROM THE NATIONAL CHURCH.

Designed to instruct and establish Young Persons among  
the Dissenters in the Principles of Nonconformity.

The E I G H T H E D I T I O N.

N. B. The Author of the Review of the Dissenters Case says of this work, that it is "cheap in price, but rich in matter, and that whoever would have a clear idea to the word Loyalty as used by the Nonconformists, should never lay it out of his hands till he has gotten it by heart."

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THE  
C A L V I N I S M  
O F T H E  
PROTESTANT DISSENTERS  
A S S E R T E D,

In a Letter to the Archdeacon of St. *Albans*. Pr. 6d.

N. B. Notwithstanding the fullest evidence afforded in this piece of the *Archdeacon's* total ignorance of the state of things among the Dissenters, the *Bishop* of St. *David's* still persists in giving the same false representations of them, though he has attempted no reply to the above Letter, excepting in a few remarks, in a new edition of his tracts, which do not affect the argument.



# C O N T E N T S.

## L E T T E R I.

*To the Rev. W. Hawkins, M. A. A Defence of the late Dr. Isaac Watts—Of free Enquiry—and of Church Authority—A Note to Dr. Priestley.*

## L E T T E R II.

*To the same. On Subscription to the Thirty-nine Articles—On the Difference of Sentiment among the Clergy.*

## L E T T E R III.

*To the same. On the dangerous Tendency of the Sentiments of Protestant Dissenters to Church and State.*

## L E T T E R IV.

*To the Right Reverend Author of A Review of the Case of the Protestant Dissenters, with respect to the Repeal of the Corporation and Test Acts—The Sentiments of the learned Abernethy on the Subject.*



A  
VINDICATION  
OF THE  
MODERN DISSENTERS.

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LETTER I.

To the Rev. W. HAWKINS, M. A.

*A Defence of the late Dr. Isaac Watts.—Of free En-  
quiry—and of Church-authority.*

REV. SIR,

AS you have thought proper, at the end of  
your *Bampton-Lecture* Sermons, to animad-  
vert upon some things in my *Notes* on the Life of  
Dr. *Watts*, in a manner which bears hard on his  
character as well as my own, I embrace the oppor-  
tunity now afforded me, in re-publishing that piece,  
to make a few remarks on what you have written, in  
order to vindicate both the Doctor and myself; and

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at the same time to defend the Protestant Dissenters in general, whom you have defamed.

The manner in which you introduce your observations on Dr. *Watts's* scheme of the Trinity is candid and respectful. P. 377, "Far from meaning to rank a late very eminent writer, Dr. *I. Watts*, in the number of notorious heretics, or in the least to detract from the excellence of his character, I think myself bound, in duty to my subject, to take some notice of the singularity of his sentiments."

I shall not attempt a defence of his hypothesis, nor am I perfectly satisfied with it, though it appears to me \* nearer the truth than yours. For  
though

\* Dr. *Priestley*, in his last *Defence of Unitarianism*, having taken a respectful notice of a passage at the end of *the Life of Dr. Watts*, objecting to a particular scheme of the Trinity, is pleased to say, "if I had examined with the same freedom what seems to be my own idea, it would have appeared as untenable a mode of maintaining the doctrine of a Trinity as this;" I take this opportunity to assure him that I have examined it with all the freedom I can, and still maintain it as very materially different from the *Socinian* doctrine. I am indeed a *Unitarian*, as really as he is, since I believe *God is one*: i. e. one infinite being; but this I do not conceive to be inconsistent with the notion of a *Trinity*. The *Logos* or essential Wisdom of God, (according to *Calvin*) which is expressly called *God*, being resident in Jesus Christ, and *made flesh*, may I think properly be called a divine person, and the Spirit, the power or active energy of God, is undoubtedly represented under personal characters, though not



though in one place you seem with him to resolve the Deity of Christ into the indwelling of the Father (p. 42), you appear on the whole to maintain the notion of three *real* divine persons, or intelligent agents, which some orthodox divines of your church have pronounced *Tritheism* †. However, had you contented yourself with opposing Dr. *Watts's* sentiments, you would have heard nothing from me. But you have thrown out such censures respecting the disposition of his mind in the pursuit of his enquiries, as not only tend to injure his character, but the cause of truth in general. On these I must take the liberty to animadvert.

After having given a view of his sentiments in a quotation from my pamphlet, and transcribed his *Solemn address to the Deity on a review of the Trini-*

as a distinct *being*. And since we find mention made of *Three*, the Father, the Son and the Holy Ghost, in such an intimate and solemn connection, in the form of Baptism, and in the christian benediction, I cannot see with what impropriety these are called the *Trinity*. It is probable I may, on some future occasion, more fully explain my ideas on this subject, and attempt to shew that they are both rational and scriptural, at the same time also attending with impartiality to the Doctor's objections, the force of which I do not at present feel, though upon some schemes they appear unanswerable. As I do not "mean to deceive," neither have I any such "dread of unpopular names" as shall keep me from giving up any opinion which I think incapable of a rational and scriptural defence.

† See particularly *South* against *Sherlock*; and the decrees of the *Oxford Synod* in favour of the *Modalists*, A.D. 1695.

*tarian controversy*, you introduce the following interrogations, to which I beg leave to give you what I think the proper answers. P. 383. “ Now for  
 “ truth’s sake I desire to ask any intelligent, im-  
 “ partial, and candid reader, whether we have not  
 “ in these passages strong indications of a waver-  
 “ ing, though pious mind?” Undoubtedly we have. And what then? I produced the passages on purpose to shew what doubt and perplexity this great and good man discovered about a subject which had employed his diligent study through life, with a view to convince my readers of the difficulty attending it, and to recommend modesty and diffidence in their enquiries, and candour towards those that think differently about it.

You proceed—“ Whether such language as this  
 “ does not rather tend to encourage specious scepticism than sound faith?” Answer. Not in regard to christianity itself, though with regard to certain human systems it may. And where is the harm if it does? Besides, what help is there for it? Must a man suppress his doubts about any point of controversy through fear lest others should doubt also? Freely to express them is the way to excite others to an impartial enquiry, and that is the best means I know of to come at the knowledge of the truth.

What follows I scarcely understand. “ Whe-  
 “ ther it is not chargeable with inconsistency be-  
 “ tween reverence and remonstrance, between de-  
 “ clarations

“clarations of acquiescence and expostulations of  
“discontent?” If you mean to ask, whether a  
man who expresses some dissatisfaction with com-  
monly received opinions is not guilty of want of  
reverence for divine truth? I answer no. And  
whatever Dr. *Watts* doubted of or denied, his re-  
verence for the word of God is most strikingly ap-  
parent in this *Solemn Address*.

Your next enquiry is very extraordinary indeed.  
“Whether, according to Dr. *Watts*’s idea, all  
“ecclesiastical authority is not, as such, altogether  
“odious or contemptible; and whether for what  
“appears to the contrary, Christianity might not  
“flourish without the existence of church pastor or  
“teacher?” Probably the Doctor might not have  
denied that the existence of true christianity in the  
mind depends upon church or pastor. But he  
himself was a pastor of a church, and I am per-  
suaded looked upon churches, pastors, and teachers,  
as of great use to promote the interest of Christ and  
truth in the world. However, as to the “autho-  
rity” of any pastor or any church “to decree con-  
troversies of faith,” and to settle the mind when it  
“wavers,” as his did, in the search after truth,  
I will answer for him he knew of none; though if  
such could have been found, he was as likely as  
any man, humbly to have acquiesced in its deci-  
sions. So I confess should I. And if you, good  
Sir, can direct me to any “ecclesiastical authority”  
which is divinely constituted to settle the wavering  
mind,



mind, and determine what is truth, I will sincerely thank you, and will neither doubt nor enquire any more. Hitherto I have found none but what, with Dr. *Watts*, I esteem “altogether odious and contemptible.”

That the authority of the Church of *Rome* may safely be pronounced such, I have no less a warrant than your own. In your first discourse, p. 4. you have the following admirable passage: “From  
 “ the acknowledged liableness of the scriptures to  
 “ the grossest abuse when in the hands of such as  
 “ are *unlearned and unstable*, the Church of *Rome*  
 “ draws her most specious argument against the  
 “ common use of them; and would have us infer  
 “ the necessity, or the certainty of an infallible au-  
 “ thority lodged in the church for the decision of  
 “ controversies, and ascertainment of a rule of  
 “ faith, from the confessed convenience and utility  
 “ of such an authority. But unfortunately for her  
 “ pretensions, as much error and absurdity has re-  
 “ peatedly been demonstrated to be within her  
 “ pale as out of it.”

You seem, however, from your frequent mention of “ecclesiastical authority,” to suppose that there is some *other* church by whose decisions we ought to be determined in our sentiments concerning religious truth. This is implied in the above reflection upon Dr. *Watts*. In one place (p. 398,) you introduce me as maintaining a most monstrous position, after which nothing is to be wondered at  
 that

that I may advance ; that “ in the scripture-plan  
 “ no traces of a national church, or of ecclesiasti-  
 “ cal authority are to be found.” And afterwards,  
 p. 400, you talk of “ precepts to obedience to spi-  
 “ ritual authority as plain,” and then ask—“ Is it  
 “ not a solecism in religion to suppose a contro-  
 “ versy without a judge ?” And again, (p. 402)  
 “ Where now is the judge of controversy ? what is  
 “ become of ecclesiastical authority ?” I really can-  
 not tell. I repeat the monstrous assertion with en-  
 creased confidence, that in the scripture no such  
 judge is appointed, nor any such authority delegated  
 to any man or body of men. If there be, pray  
 Sir be so kind as to point out the passage, and I  
 will pay you my most grateful acknowledgments.  
 I wish you also to name the church in which such a  
 judge is to be found, and by which such authority  
 is lawfully claimed. You have your eye evidently  
 directed to your *own*—the Church of *England*.  
 She indeed we well know claims “ authority in  
 “ controversies of faith.” But we take the liberty  
 to dispute the justice, and censure the arrogance of  
 that claim with the same freedom and on the same  
 grounds, that you dispute and censure the like  
 claim of the Church of *Rome*. You yourself in-  
 deed seem to hesitate about the extent of it, and  
 in fact reduce it to nothing, p. 412 : “ Under this  
 “ persuasion, the Church of England, as a national  
 “ church, as a church reformed from the gross  
 “ errors, corruptions and superstitions of *Rome*, has

“ not only power to decree rites or ceremonies;  
“ but authority in controversies of faith, viz. autho-  
“ rity not to DETERMINE, but to DECLARE.” By  
what follows I suppose this curious distinction to  
mean, that the Church of England has authority to  
declare to her members what she thinks to be the  
truth, but not to determine for them, much less for  
others, what their faith shall be. But let me ask,  
Sir, can you seriously think that this is all your good  
mother meant in her 20th article, and whether her  
true sons will thank you for thus reducing her au-  
thority? For this is in fact reducing it to nothing  
more than every church and every Christian has an  
equal right to. The little Independent church of  
which I am pastor, has an undoubted right to de-  
clare what she deems truth and error, and so has  
every member of it; and I think myself to have  
equal right to declare the contrary, if I am in any  
thing differently minded. If you suppose your  
church to have no higher a claim than this, none  
will dispute it with her. But then, good Sir, let  
me retort your question, “ Where is ecclesiastical  
“ authority?” The authority by which disputes are  
to be settled, and to which you insinuate Dr. *Watts*  
should have submitted, when he found his mind in  
such a “ wavering” state concerning the Trinity?  
The mere *declaration* of your church would not have  
resolved his doubts any more than that of his own,  
or of the church of *Rome*; nor will the declaration  
of any church be of the least avail to decide con-  
troverfies



troverfies of faith, unlefs that church can prove ſhe has, what the Church of *Rome* more conſiſtently pretends to, INFALLIBILITY, or a power delegated from Chriſt.

Your next queſtion concerning Dr. *Watts* is—  
 “ Whether we have not in this illuſtrious Diſſenter,  
 “ an extraordinary inſtance of the compatibility of  
 “ radical and invincible prejudice, with an honeſt  
 “ and good heart, and a ſolid underſtanding?”  
 After ſome enquiries about other particulars, which I am not diſpoſed to litigate with you, I find the following paſſage in which you yourſelf answer the above interrogation: “ I ſhall content myſelf with  
 “ expreſſing my aſtoniſhment at the force of pre-  
 “ judice in one who ſo ſtrongly inculcates an in-  
 “ difference for every thing but truth, and cenſures  
 “ ſo ſeverely all party attachments. For with all  
 “ his gentleneſs, benevolence, charity, and love of  
 “ truth, Dr. W. appears to me to have been biaſ-  
 “ fed by more than ordinary prepoſſeſſions.” You add, p. 387, “ He muſt, to my apprehenſion, be  
 “ conſidered as proteſting againſt the doctrine of  
 “ a trinity of *perſons*, chiefly becauſe it was an  
 “ eſtabliſhed one; becauſe it was the doctrine of  
 “ the church.” If, Sir, you can ſeriously believe this laſt ſuggeſtion to be true, I cannot conceive how you could admit either Dr. W.’s “ under-  
 “ ſtanding or piety.” The man that is capable of oppoſing any doctrine, merely becauſe it is held by any church, even that of *Rome*, cannot in my  
 C opinion

opinion have any great share of either. And what you say of his "invincible prejudices," has so little apparent foundation, that his *solemn address to the Deity* proves nothing so plainly as his *freedom from prejudice*, and his earnest desire to find the truth wherever it was to be met with. And indeed I will take upon me to prove from his other writings, that he was so far from labouring under any prejudices *against* the commonly received doctrine of the Trinity, that if he had any prejudices at all, they lay quite on the other side. Accordingly, the professed advocates for the Unitarian doctrine have in nothing censured Dr. *Watts* so much, as for his backwardness to express his own real sentiments in plain unequivocal terms, through fear of offending the orthodox, with whom he was most connected through life, and for his too great anxiety to appear, as much as possible, united in sentiment with them.

I am, Sir, &c.

L E T.

## LETTER II.

*On Subscription — and the Diversity of Sentiment  
among the Clergy.*

REV. SIR,

HAVING so much mistaken the mark in your animadversions on Dr. *Watts*, and so grossly misrepresented *him*, I cannot wonder at any thing you are pleased to say of *me*; nor need I to be greatly affected by it. However (to use your own words) “For truth’s sake I desire to ask “any intelligent, impartial and candid reader,” whether your remarks on some of my notes are not equally groundless and injurious?

You introduce them thus, p. 395, “I shall take “this opportunity to animadvert on certain dirty “aspersions in a late performance, from the hand “of a rigid Non-conformist, and perhaps\* an “avowed unbeliever, and perhaps both! The “anonymous editor of Dr. *Johnson’s* Life of Dr. “*I. Watts*, with notes, sacrifices to the virulence “of his disposition every regard to decency, charity and truth.” I shall make no remark upon

\* If I am an *avowed* unbeliever, your *perhaps* is redundant.



these "asperfions" of yours, but leaving the reader to give them the proper epithet, shall proceed to examine what you have to offer by way of *argument* against my last note, which has given you the principal offence.

You think I had no just occasion to censure Dr. *Johnson* for his bigotry, merely on account of the manner in which he mentions Dr. *Watts's Non-conformity*. I grant he might have expressed himself in severer terms. But I must maintain, that when he was proposing the excellent character of the Doctor to imitation, and so highly extolled "his benevolence to man and his reverence to God," it shewed a narrowness of mind unworthy of such a writer, to "except his non-conformity," which certainly had nothing to do with his moral character. However, to wave all further remarks on this head, I think every impartial person must allow, that if there was nothing censurable in Dr. *Johnson* as a church-man for taking this notice of Dr. *Watts's* non-conformity, there was nothing unbecoming me as a Dissenter, to take occasion from this circumstance to remark Dr. *Johnson's* ignorance of the principles of the Dissenters, and to offer what occurred to me in defence of them.

You are principally offended with me for declaring my apprehension that the subscription, required as the condition of ministerial conformity, is such as few can be supposed uprightly to comply with, and for asserting that many of your clergy are  
known

known to disbelieve some of those articles to which they have professed their assent and consent. Upon quoting the whole of the passage, (which I beg the reader to review) you express yourself thus: "If these representations are just, and these assertions true, the controversy is absolutely decided with a vengeance, and the bulk of the clergy of the Church of England are as great a set or sc—ndr—ls as can be produced in the annals of the human race." The reader will be pleased to observe, that these "dirty aspersions" are not mine. I had drawn no conclusion, but merely asserted the fact, which I was willing to reconcile with goodness of character in the main, upon the ground of strong prejudices, arising from custom and other circumstances, which insensibly operate upon upright minds. And I am still backward to apply the harsh epithets you adopt, even to yourself. But I am willing to rest the controversy on this single point, though some will think you rash in so doing; for I must maintain, and I believe few of your brethren will contradict me, that the number of points comprehended in the subscription, which your church requires is so great, and some of them (to say the least) so disputable, that it is incredible that all the clergy should believe every individual of them, and it is notorious that many of them openly disavow it. It might be sufficient to refer any intelligent person either to the pulpit discourses, or the printed works

of

of your clergy; many of which manifestly contradict each other, particularly in what *Dean Tucker* calls the *Quinquarticular* Controversy. Some are zealous *Calvinists*, and others as zealous *Arminians*. Nor is their diversity of sentiment confined to these points of doctrine: it is well known to extend to what many deem infinitely more important, that of the Trinity and the Atonement; while the majority are, with you, zealous *Athanasians*, there are not a few, and some of your dignitaries too, avowed *Arians* and even *Socinians*. You, Sir, cannot be a stranger to the writings of *Clark*, *Hoadley*, *Law*, *Sykes*, &c. now numbered with the dead, nor to others of the same description yet living; many of whom were not long since associated at the *Feathers Tavern* for petitioning the Parliament to abolish subscription to the Thirty-nine Articles, and substitute the holy scriptures in their stead.

But besides these more capital points of doctrine, about which the disagreement among some of your clergy is so notorious, there are others of less importance from which they more generally dissent, though the subscription demanded requires them to be as unanimous with respect to these. Nor do they usually make a secret of it. I myself have heard very respectable clergymen confess, that when they took orders "they subscribed *in the gross*, and "did not mean to assent to every individual "point."

As



As to the principle of subscribing to the articles "not as articles of *faith* but of *peace*," it is so very common and notorious, that I am astonished you should be so much offended with my mentioning it. But this is not the only principle upon which your clergy have been used to subscribe, there are at least a dozen more, besides that which the preamble to the articles expressly mentions, and which we Dissenters think the only one that is vindicable, as the professed design of the subscription is "to avoid diversity of opinions." Dr. *Priestley* has reckoned them up at the end of his last *Defence of Unitarianism*, to which I beg leave to refer you. If this diversity of *principle*, upon which your clergy avowedly subscribe, be not an incontestible proof of a diversity of *opinions*, I am at a loss to conceive any thing which could have been such. One of the most eminent of your bishops, as quoted in the above tract, viz. Bishop *Burnet*, makes the following confession, which will be thought decisive. "The greater part subscribe the articles without examining them; and others do it because they must do it, though they can hardly satisfy their consciences about some things in them." But this, which was undeniably matter of fact in his day, is more notorious, and in a greater degree the case in the present day, in consequence of a more thorough investigation of the several subjects of theological debate. I could easily refer you to numerous publications by *Calvinists* and *Arminians*,

*Trini-*

*Trinitarians* and *Unitarians*, who have all subscribed the same articles. But most of my readers, as well as yourself, must be too well acquainted with them to render it necessary. I will therefore content myself with quoting the authority of two of your dignitaries; the one the late Bishop, the other the present Arch-deacon, of *Carlisle*. The former in his *Considerations on Subscriptions*, mentions it as a matter altogether incredible that such a body of men as the Clergy of the church of England, should be able to assent to such a great number of propositions as the 39 articles contain. The latter in his *Moral and Political Philosophy*, having treated of "Lies and Oaths," proceeds naturally enough to *Subscription* to articles of Religion, and expresses himself in these words: "They who contend that  
 " nothing less can justify subscription to the 39 ar-  
 " ticles, than the actual belief of each and every  
 " separate proposition contained in them, must  
 " suppose, that the legislature expected the consent  
 " of ten thousand men, and that in perpetual suc-  
 " cession, not to one controverted proposition, but  
 " to many hundreds. It is difficult to conceive  
 " how this could be expected by any, who ob-  
 " served the incurable diversity of human opinion  
 " upon all subjects short of demonstration." See Vol. I. p. 219.

If any other authority be thought necessary for my vindication, it shall be *your own*. Very early in your *Discourses* you have a passage which in your

*Annotations* you seem to have forgotten. You introduce certain objectors as saying of the doctrines asserted in your Articles, "to these *Subscription* is "much more universal than agreement;" and you immediately confess "it is indeed *too true*."

By this time I apprehend, Sir, the impartial reader, if not yourself, will think that I had at least some plausible reason for saying what has given you such great offence, "that if the terms of conformity were a declaration in the clergy that "they *did not believe all and every thing*, &c. it is "undeniable that many (not to say the most) of "those that conform might very conscientiously "make it." I will now go farther, and say, my firm opinion is, that notwithstanding the uniformity of subscription to all and every thing in your Articles, if another BAMPTON should arise, and endow a new lecture as liberally as that which you had the honour to preach, for the express purpose of maintaining doctrines *the reverse* of those which you have so zealously defended, there would not be wanting clergymen who would with equal ability fulfil the will of the founder, and with equal eloquence celebrate his wisdom\*, piety and munificence. It is more than possible that preachers of opposite sentiments may obtain the liberal emolument which the late *Canon of Salisbury* devised, if we may judge from a well-known fact which has

\* See the Dedication.



happened in another similar institution. *Lady Moyer's* lecture at *St. Paul's* was some years ago preached by an avowed Socinian. That this may not be stigmatized as a "dirty aspersions," I refer the reader to the printed discourses on the *Logos*, &c. by *Dr. Benjamin Dawson*, which are dedicated to the *Bishop of Norwich*.

On the whole, I may venture to affirm that there is as great a difference between the sentiments of some of the conforming clergy and those of others, as there is between theirs and some of the nonconformists, so that the latter might with as much propriety subscribe the Articles and enjoy the emoluments of the established church as the former. Nor is it to be conceived that any thing but a principle of conscience should prevent their doing it. In what degree their conduct in this matter entitles them to "a good opinion either for their understandings or their integrity," I leave the world to judge.

I am, &c.

L E T.

## L E T T E R III.

*On the dangerous Tendency of the Sentiments of Protestant Dissenters to Church and State.*

REV. SIR,

FROM some things which I had advanced in vindicating the Dissenters (though I am at a loss to find what they are) you have formed such ideas of their opinions as to have expressed the most formidable apprehensions from them, as of a most destructive tendency. Having observed, (p. 399) “ that *exceeding mad* as the *Puritans* and their “ friends in the last century were against the go- “ vernours of the church, and our whole eccle- “ siastical polity, THEY appear to have been more “ than ordinarily solicitous to express their full “ assent and consent to the most material articles “ of our faith: their quarrel was not against our “ doctrine but our discipline ;” and having quoted “ the *Assembly’s Confession of Faith*, you add—“ from “ which circumstances I take occasion to ask whe- “ ther, as far as we may reasonably collect from “ the style and sentiments of the editor of Dr. “ *Johnson’s Life of Dr. Watts, with Notes*, the views

“ and dispositions of the Protestant Dissenters of  
 “ this age have not a tendency more inimical and  
 “ destructive, than were those of these same an-  
 “ cestors of theirs who triumphed in the ruin both  
 “ of church and state.”

Now, Sir, on this head, I will endeavour to give you satisfaction and allay your fears; especially as the alarm has been so generally spread through the sacerdotal order, by the recent attempts of the Dissenters to obtain a repeal of the *Corporation* and *Test Acts*. Indeed, my dear Sir, you need not be alarmed either for the State or the Church. You have nothing to fear from us, even though we should, contrary to our expectations, obtain all we wish; much less from our doctrinal sentiments. As to these indeed, I will venture to affirm that the majority of us, (notwithstanding what the late Arch-deacon of *St. Albans*, now Bishop of *St. David's*, has so confidently maintained) are much nearer to our fore-fathers the Puritans, in doctrine, and to the articles of your church, than the generality of your clergy are \*. But were the fact otherwise, and were we generally as heterodox as you suppose us to be, I cannot conceive how our opinions about matters of faith should endanger either Church or State. The only principles which can be rationally supposed to affect either, are those

\* See a pamphlet entitled *The Calvinism of the Dissenters asserted, in a Letter to the Arch-deacon of St. Albans.*



that relate to discipline and politics. But in regard to these, you have no just ground of apprehension from us.

We are indeed greatly averse to all impositions on conscience; we cannot profess to approve Diocesan Episcopacy; nor can we relish the doctrine of passive obedience and non-resistance. We are generally zealous friends to Liberty, civil and religious, and we think we understand it better than our fore-fathers did. We are, however, strongly attached to the English civil constitution, as defined at the Revolution, and are firm friends to the House of *Brunswick*. As such we think we have a just claim to be put on an equal footing with our fellow-subjects, and are ready in the execution of any offices with which we may be intrusted, to serve our king and country. But we have no disposition to effect any change in the state, nor, be assured, to attempt the downfall of the church. Much less have we any design or any wish to erect *Presbyterianism* on the ruins of *Episcopacy*. On this head you and your brethren may make yourselves perfectly easy, even though the repeal of the Corporation and Test Acts should give us greater power, and introduce more of us into places of influence, than it is probable or possible it should.

I will give you one very substantial reason for relying on the truth of what I say. The revolution which has taken place in the sentiments of the Dissenters in the present age, is such as renders

them not *more* "inimical and dangerous," in the views you suppose, than our fore-fathers the Puritans, or the first Nonconformists were, but abundantly *less* so. They approved of church-establishments, and were zealous for a Presbyterian national church. And they actually "triumphed in the ruin both of church and state." We are far from joining in that triumph, and farther from wishing to see it renewed. We should think with abhorrence of seeing any one denomination of Dissenters advanced to ecclesiastical power, and enjoying those emoluments of yours, for which you and your brethren are so sadly apprehensive. And the great diversity of sentiments which there is at present among us, and the number of parties into which we are divided, would alone be a sufficient security against ours becoming the established religion of this country, whatever power we might (contrary to all human probability) acquire in the state. It would be an absolute impossibility in the nature of things, that so many and such heterogeneous bodies of men as compose the present Dissenters, should ever be united in one church-establishment. As no one of them would ever be suffered by the rest to establish itself, neither is there any one that wishes it, or that would not much rather see *Episcopacy* remain for ever where it is. And while there is a church-establishment at all, so long as the Episcopalians are the majority, we are ready to admit they ought to have the pre-eminence;

nence ; it being a universal principle among us, that the voice of majorities should always determine.

Amidst all the diversity of opinions that, in consequence of a happy freedom of enquiry prevails among us, there is one principle in which we are universally agreed : viz. THAT CHRIST'S KINGDOM IS NOT OF THIS WORLD ; and that it is so far from needing the civil power or the wealth of this world for its support, that these are its greatest enemies. So long therefore as we can enjoy liberty to worship God according to the dictates of our own consciences, and what we think the rules of his word, we envy you none of your dignities and emoluments. Our ministers are much better satisfied with the voluntary and cheerful contributions of their people, than they would be with the largest state-endowments. And our laity, though not averse to the honours and advantages connected with certain civil offices to which they have an equal claim with the rest of their countrymen, desire them no further than they shall be thought to deserve them, by the faithful discharge of their duty ; and are equally ready to serve their country by sustaining offices of burthen which have no emolument annexed. Nor is it their wish to enjoy either honours or profits any otherwise, (nor indeed CAN they\*) than by the appointment of their So-

\* It is astonishing that our opponents keep this consideration out of sight.



vereign, or the free choice of their fellow-citizens; nor to hold them any longer than while they approve themselves peaceable and loyal subjects to their King, and useful members of the community. And those of them who have been entrusted with such offices already, may boldly make their appeal to the members of the establishment themselves, whether their deportment has not on the whole been as unexceptionable, as exemplary, and as useful as that of their fellow subjects of any other description.

Permit me to add, if the church or the state be in any danger, it is not from the opinions of *Dissenters*, either in religion or politics, but from the bigotry, the false zeal, and intolerance of high-flying Episcopalians; to which, indeed, the downfall of both in the last age is to be ascribed more than to any other cause whatever.

I am, Sir,

With all due respect,

Yours, &c.

L E T.

## L E T T E R IV.

*To the Right Reverend Author of the Review of the  
Case of the Protestant Dissenters.*

MY LORD,

HAVING seen your *Review of the Case of the Protestant Dissenters*, before the preceding letters were printed off, I was tempted to subjoin a few remarks upon this extraordinary performance, in which you have attempted to promote the same injurious and unjust views of the principles and designs of the present Dissenters, that Mr. *Hawkins* had before done, but with more abundant energy, zeal and malignity. To this I feel myself the more inclined, as I am personally concerned, your Lordship having done me the honour of exhibiting a work of mine to the notice of the public, as a confirmation of your apprehensions of danger both to church and state from the principles of that body of people with whom I stand connected. It is to this single point that I shall call my reader's attention, leaving the rest of your performance to some abler hand.

Be assured, my Lord, I am not very sanguine in my wishes respecting the repeal of the *Corporation*

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*and Test Acts*, any further than as the cause of equity, and the honour of religion are concerned. Nor would I have interfered in this controversy at all, had it not been for the violent attack of the Bampton Lecturer, and a firm conviction that the ground of opposition which he and you, and many more have taken against us, is fallacious; that your reflections on the modern Dissenters are ill-founded, and of an injurious tendency; and that your apprehensions of danger from their present attempts, if REAL, are altogether delusive.

The truth of this, I should presume, would appear sufficiently obvious to any wise, unprejudiced reader, from the considerations stated in the preceding letter to Mr. *Hawkins*. But you, my Lord, have yourself corroborated my argument, by the strongest assertion of the leading fact on which it is grounded. You have told your readers (what I presume many of them were not aware of) that the present Dissenters are averse to the civil establishment of any religion, not excepting their own. P. 21, "They hold all alliance of a church with Government to be profane and anti-christian. We object, say they, to a *constitution*, and every Dissenter who makes this objection, must dissent from his own church, were it once to accept of an establishment." True, my Lord, and admirably expressed.

To confirm your assertion, you have so far honoured me, (and no small honour do I esteem it)



as to quote my *Protestant Dissenter's Catechism*, in answer to the question, *What do the Dissenters object to the general constitution of the Church of England?*

A. "That it is a civil establishment." I should not have been offended, had your Lordship produced the answer at length. But that perhaps might not have been so prudent. Give me leave however to transcribe the whole. "That it is a  
" civil establishment; it being framed by human  
" authority—its laws founded on Acts of Parlia-  
" ments, and enforced by civil sanctions—and the  
" chief magistrate, as such, being its supreme  
" head. Whereas a church of Christ, according  
" to the scripture account of it, is a society of per-  
" sons united merely on religious views, whose laws  
" are no other than the word of God, (which they  
" have a right to interpret for themselves) the  
" sanctions of which are purely spiritual, and  
" whose supreme and only head is Jesus Christ." Now, if these be the principles of the Protestant Dissenters, (and so far as I know this is universally the case) I leave any unprejudiced person to judge how little cause you have for the alarm which has seized you, and which you have attempted to propagate through the kingdom, from the supposition that the Dissenters, by seeking the repeal of the Corporation and Test Acts, design nothing less than to expel the dignitaries of your church, and invest their own ministers with your honours and emoluments. p. 58.

Should it be suggested, that they may wish to overturn the present establishment, though not to take possession of it themselves; I refer, for the proper answer, to what I have observed in the preceding letter, and to the subsequent part of this.

But your Lordship has attempted to propagate a further idea, that the Dissenters are as hostile to the *state* as to the *church*. “Let them not pretend (say you, p. 32,) that friendship to the peace of church and state, attachment to the Government, and loyalty to the King, are the characters of Non-conformity.” And p. 29, “they are used to treat the subject of civil liberty, in a manner that hath given too much reason to suspect, that the principles of a Non-conformist in religion, and a Republican in politics, are inseparably united.” For the falsehood of these suggestions, it is sufficient to appeal to the history of the Dissenters ever since the revolution, to the acknowledgments of many of your own church, or to the publications of our *approved* writers, of whom some that have been the most suspected, have passed the highest encomiums on the English constitution, and strenuously defended the fundamental principles of it\*. I am so well founded in my persuasion on this head, as to affirm, that they who

\* The most unequivocal passages of this kind might be produced from the writings of Dr. Price, Dr. Kippis, and Dr. Priestley. A few detached sentences prove nothing.

represent the Dissenters as in general more inimical to the excellent constitution of their country, or less loyal to their present Sovereign, than the rest of their fellow-subjects, are either more ignorant of their avowed principles and general deportment, than I can suppose your Lordship to be, or actuated by a degree of malice inconsistent with the Christian character. And that those publications which are circulated to propagate such ideas of the Non-conformists, are as much designed as calculated to inflame the passions of their countrymen, and to excite the prejudices of their governors, merely with a view to subserve the sinister purposes of a party.

Since your Lordship has thought fit to quote my Catechism as an authority for the ideas you wish to propagate of the Dissenters, let me ask, my Lord, why you have kept out of sight what I have endeavoured to instil into the minds of our youth, on the subjects of *loyalty, peaceableness, and charity*. As you have roundly asserted that I have inculcated "no one principle of the Christian religion, or of any religion under the sun," and have insinuated that the whole tract is calculated to promote a spirit injurious to Government and civil society, justice to myself\* obliges me to produce the following extracts. In the very same page

\* If any other writer has used any unjustifiable language, let him stand corrected, but let not the whole body be condemned.



page that contains the former quotation, I have taught my catechumens that “in civil matters we think it our duty to obey the King.” In the closing section I have instructed them—“that it is the duty of those whose consciences would be uneasy with conformity in a *peaceable* manner, to dissent: that they ought to be exceedingly thankful to God for, and diligent to improve the liberty they enjoy: that they should also be grateful to their civil governors, the King, and those in authority under him, through whose clemency they enjoy privileges superior to those of their ancestors in former reigns; and to testify their gratitude by approving themselves good subjects, endeavouring to promote the prosperity of their country, and preserve its peace: that they should maintain their principles by all such methods as are consistent with peace, liberty, and charity; still making it to appear that their zeal is principally directed to the cause of practical godliness, and the interest of Christ at large, even in *that church from which they dissent*: that they should love good men of every name, and rejoice wheresoever Christ is preached

As to the *Harlow Synod*, I should think that the writer, if he be truly guessed, knew enough of that country to be satisfied, that no very great number of our regular ministers could be concerned in the *imprimatur* alluded to, and it is possible they might not approve every sentence, *if they had read the book.*

“ and

“and God is worshipped in spirit, though the  
“mode be different from their own.”

These, my Lord, are the principles we wish to disseminate among our youth, while we instruct them in the grounds of Nonconformity. And as to other points of christian faith and practice, which are not inculcated in this work, they were not omitted, as you uncandidly suggest, because we are indifferent to them, but because we have *other* Catechisms, the sole object of which is to explain and enforce them. And I will venture to say, that the great principles of piety and morality are as diligently impressed on the minds of our children, and as carefully attended to by the members of our churches, as they are by any in your communion. And though we have no cause for boasting, we may safely appeal to our neighbours, whether our people are not on the whole as exemplary in all relative duties, as peaceable members of society, and as useful in the community, as the most dutiful sons of the church. We may possibly have individuals among us who are zealous for party distinctions; who may carry their notions of liberty to excess; who may be too fond of novelties, and too forward to introduce improvements in matters ecclesiastical and civil; who may be too ready to speak evil of dignities, and who love to rule rather than to obey. But however culpable some may be in these respects, it is not because they are *Dissenters*, but because they are men; *men of like passions*  
with

*with others* in different communions. Are there not churchmen, my Lord, of the same description in equal numbers? Nor are they found among the laity only; the same impetuosity of temper, the same pride and ambition, the same thirst after honours and emoluments, affects the clerical order; and both among the one and the other, there are those who, in order to secure to themselves the good things which persons of a different description are thought to aspire after, would sow discord among brethren; would promote tumults in their neighbourhoods; would sound the alarm of danger through the kingdom; would head mobs at elections; would secure votes for members of parliament by bribes or threatenings; would preach sermons and print pamphlets, full of invective and falsehood; and, in short, would leave no stone unturned to carry their party-schemes. These, my Lord, are the men from whom the church and the state are in danger, more than from those who wish the repeal of laws which are a disgrace to the statute-book, a scandal to religion, and without a parallel in any other protestant or even popish country.

If the Dissenters are dangerous at all, it is such men and such measures that make them so. And much more is to be apprehended from a violent opposition to them, than from granting them the utmost that they demand. If it could be justly suspected that they had any designs hostile to church or state, what greater power would they acquire for



the execution of them after the repeal of the Corporation and Test Acts than they have now? The repeal of those Acts would only render them *eligible* to offices: it would not of itself invest them with any office. This would depend on the appointment of the king, or the choice of their fellow-citizens, the great majority of whom are churchmen; and *both* upon their own peaceable and loyal deportment. The number of those who would actually enjoy any offices would be very inconsiderable, and the influence which they would acquire in the state would be so small as not to render them capable of any mischief, were they ever so much bent upon doing it. Unless they should miraculously effect their purpose by force of arms, they must bring the King, Lords and Commons, over on their side; but can any man in his senses indulge a serious apprehension of either?

But it is utterly incredible that they should attempt or design any injurious change in the constitution, in consequence of their being put upon a level with their fellow-citizens. If *Gratitude* did not restrain them, *Self-interest* undoubtedly would. And this is a principle which so strongly operates upon mankind of all classes, that it may easily be admitted this alone would be a sufficient security to the throne, to the constitution, and to the church; unless Dissenters have less policy than you will be ready to allow them.

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I will close the present address with an extract from the writings of the learned and judicious *Abernethy*, which contributed much towards the repeal of the Corporation and Test Acts in *Ireland*, and deserved to have been reprinted here on the present occasion, (especially after the republication of *Dean Swift's* malignant tract) as they contain every thing important on the subject, and are drawn up with all that candour, perspicuity, and force of reasoning, for which the author was distinguished. I beg leave to recommend the whole to your Lordship's perusal \*.

“ Will any man pretend that restoring the Dissenters to the common rights of subjects, can with the smallest degree of likelihood be imagined to introduce universal confusion into our civil constitution, and utterly dissolve the frame of our government? On the contrary it might easily be shewn, that there could hardly be a more effectual means fallen upon to secure this constitution from the possible fatal effects of some inherent principles of corruption and dissolution. The supposition is on all sides so monstrously foolish and unnatural, that it is not easy to fix where to begin to expose it.—To alledge that the Dissenters, after all they have done to secure our present form of govern-

\* See scarce and valuable Tracts, by the late Reverend and learned *John Abernethy*, M. A. author of the *Discourses on the Being and Perfections of God*, p. 48, &c.

ment, will engage in a rebellion to overturn it, is plainly to suppose that they must, by some unhappy fatality, be changed from men of the same prudence and principles of action with the rest of the world, into such visionary enthusiasts, as to expect that Jesus Christ will come down from heaven and put himself at their head, for without this, or some other expectation equally absurd, it is manifestly impossible that they could ever promise themselves the least success. Hitherto it has commonly been thought that *oppression* was the natural means of *making men mad*; but seeing this has never yet been able to produce that effect on the Protestant Dissenters, it is presumed, I suppose, that they must be of a quite different nature from the rest of mankind, and that the removing of all appearances of oppression may probably make them so. It is hard to keep the mind serious on such an objection as this: but in earnest, is it possible to imagine, that the removing out of the way all reasonable grounds of dissatisfaction and complaint, can have any manner of tendency to provoke men to engage in a most unnatural and desperate attempt to destroy that constitution, at the expence of their fortunes and lives, which hitherto, with the manifest hazard of both, even under all discouragements and reasonable grounds of complaint, they have with distinguishing unanimity been most remarkably zealous to support."

“ Shall it be said, that the church of England was once overturned, and with it the monarchy, and therefore it is reasonable to provide against the like danger for the future? This argument will easily be answered by considering the confusions of that unhappy period and the causes of them—the oppressions which the nation had long groaned under, the illegal proceedings of the court and its ministers, &c. In all these evils many ecclesiastics had a share, which rendered the mitre as well as the crown very obnoxious to the generality of the people. If the war was unjustly begun on the parliament’s part, the injustice was not to be charged on the Dissenters, for it is well known there were few of them in the parliament. No man of common sense and candour will say, that the commencement of the war was owing to *their capacity of holding places of power and trust under the king*. And if so, how can any argument be drawn from it for incapacitating their successors to hold any such places?

“ In the event of that war great changes happened; the constitution both in church and state was overturned. But to what cause must all this be attributed? Not to the Dissenters being legally *capable of civil offices*; but some persons taking hold of the distracted state of the nation, as the proper and only opportunity, seized the supreme power, and abolished both the regal and ecclesiastical authority; which they were therefore able to accomplish,



plish, because the grievous *abuse of both* had disposed the people to comply with that otherwise impracticable scheme.

“ Upon the whole it appears, that the true inference from the history of the civil wars, and the fatal catastrophe of *Charles I.* and the established church, is NOT that the Dissenters should be oppressed and deprived of the commons rights of subjects; but that all possible precautions should be taken against illegal and arbitrary measures, against all attempts to exalt the prerogative, above the laws; and against the influence of the clergy to forward such attempts, for these were the real and immediate causes of former disorders. Let any one judge, whether to prevent such evils for the future, the abridging of the Dissenters’ liberty and capacity of public usefulness by the sacramental Test be a proper expedient.”

In addition to the above I will only ask, whether if, after all, any will maintain that the Dissenters are the dangerous people they have been supposed, it can be seriously believed, by any man of common sense, that men of such base principles would generally scruple receiving the sacrament once a year in the church of England? and whether their doing so would be at all likely to make them better, or would contribute so much to render them good and peaceable subjects, as abolishing all odious and injurious distinctions between them and their country-men, on account merely of religious principles?

ples? In a word; whether to unite his majesty's subjects, by breaking down the wall of partition between them, would not be the most effectual means to strengthen the hands of government, and secure the present happy constitution?

I am, My Lord,

With all due respect,

Your Lordship's

Obedient Servant,

S. P.

P. S. Since the above was printed, I have had the pleasure to see the same sentiments admirably illustrated and confirmed by an able and learned Prelate of your church, in a piece lately re-published, entitled *Bishop Hoadly's Refutation of Bishop Sherlock's Arguments against a Repeal of the Test and Corporation Acts*: which it should seem your Lordship had never read when you recommended Dr. Sherlock's performance as what "may rank among the first of controversial writings."

THE END.





